

Hi friends,

I have just been informed by Paul Birtel, supported by Eli Courtwright, Joel Attanasio, Jack Boyd, and Bunny Smith, that he is terminating me from my position as Events Director for MAGFest, Inc. I owe the members of this community my deepest thanks for supporting me and believing in me—not just over the past few weeks, but throughout my entire time at MAGFest. I am so grateful to you all, even to those of you who were skeptical, disapproving, or condemning of my actions as part of the Friends of MAGFest. one of the central points of my letter was that, contrary to what the above-listed folks believe, the expression of disagreement is the *opposite* of disrespectful at MAGFest, as long as it is done respectfully and in the spirit of our values, which I have always strived to embody. I encourage you to speak up early, often, and publicly when you have questions or concerns about the governance of our community. thank you all for your honesty, passion, and consideration. you are what makes MAGFest so much greater than the sum of its parts.

I am so deeply sorry for the pain and inconvenience that this situation has caused you, the staff. it has weighed extremely heavily on me while navigating this. I tried for months to work through this environment, and then I tried for months to resolve it, and then I tried to ignore it, until my personal integrity and ethics would not allow me to do so anymore. if I had felt there was any further way for me to work through it, resolve it, or ignore it, I would have. please know that working alongside my coworkers, our staff, and our community at MAGFest has been the pride and joy of my life in the three and a half years that I have had the privilege to serve as an employee. as I've said in other comments recently on the staff Slack instance, MAGFest the community is much more important to me than MAGFest the company, and I have no doubt the community will survive, adapt, and outlast what becomes of the company. although I know it seems unlikely right now, I very much hope to be able to work on different projects with you all in the future. let's not stop making cool shit happen in this world just because some people are grumpy that they don't have the unilateral, unquestioned control that they feel their titles merit.

please take care of yourselves and each other, and please pay attention to your own values and boundaries if and when you continue your work with MAGFest. I have immense respect for all of you, regardless of where you land on the spectrum of those decisions. feel free to reach out to me if speaking with me further would help you navigate this stuff.

ok, and this quote is *far* too presumptuous, I'm sorry, but I'm indulging myself anyway because when else will I have occasion to use it: "you will find that I will only truly have left this school when none here are loyal to me." if you need me, or even if you just wanna catch up and hang out, you know where to find me.

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love,
Debra

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Debra Lenik
former Events Director and employee of MAGFest, Inc.

PS: I do want to share some specific details surrounding my firing, for what they're worth. first, I was told that Jasmin (our HR manager) was unaware of the decision to fire me and that PB intended to restructure HR significantly in the months to come (the optics of which come off very, very badly to me). second, I was explicitly told that the decision to fire me was not in any way related to the Friends of MAGFest

website, but rather for my “work performance surrounding the writeup I received from the board,” which I continue to consider retaliatory towards me. and lastly, although it was completely within PB’s power to structure this differently, I was informed that my health insurance would be terminated at the end of the month (i.e. in 3 days) unless I were to sign a separation agreement that prevents me from filing any suit against the company, among other things. of course, a company has the *right* to do that, but if that’s what they *choose* to do, it’s not a company I want to work for anyway. I find it despicable, unethical, and astonishingly antithetical to the MAGFest core values to eliminate healthcare coverage from a longtime, dedicated employee in the middle of a pandemic unless they give up their right to express grievances about the mistreatment they suffered and were fired for exposing.

I gotta stop there because my bitterness is starting to get the better of me and I haven’t eaten yet today, but MAGFest staff, I love you, and again I can’t thank you enough for the outpouring of kind words and support towards me. <3 d.